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## **PARTNERS CELEBRATE GRAND OPENING OF WALTER BAKER LOFTS**

DORCHESTER – Bob Durand, Secretary of Environmental affairs, today joined with House of Representatives Speaker Thomas M. Finneran, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, state Sen. Brian A. Joyce, Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Commissioner Peter C. Webber and other guests to celebrate the grand opening of the Walter Baker Lofts in Lower Mills.

Robert Kuehn, of Keen Development Corporation, renovated the building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building was once the headquarters of the centuries-old chocolate manufacturer, the Walter Baker Company. Two years ago, DEM selected Keen Development in partnership with Historic Massachusetts, Inc., as the project sponsors and “curator/tenant” of the Administration Building to rehabilitate, reuse and lease this historic property. Keen and HMI proposed to convert the Administration Building into the Walter Baker Lofts.

Construction began in October 2001 and the building now includes 13 artist lofts with residential and work space for moderate-income residents through an innovative leasing program for historic public properties.

“Community Preservation is one of EOE’s highest priorities and the rehabilitation and conversion of the Walter Baker Administration Building into Walter Baker Lofts will ensure the continued revitalization and preservation of Dorchester Lower Mills,” said Secretary Durand. “Public-private partnerships such as this are critical to carrying out our community preservation goals.”

“The historic nature and ground visibility of this building have been frequently noted,” said Speaker Finneran. “Today’s dedication brings action and life to what have been heretofore only words and dreams. Our community should celebrate such achievement.”

“Today is a day of celebration,” said Mayor Menino. “Not only for the renovation of this historic building and the 13 new units of affordable artist housing it brings, but for the unique partnership that made today a reality. I’m proud that the city was able to work with the state and the private sector on such an important project. Here in Boston we continue our efforts to bring more affordable housing and more affordable artist housing online. I’m thrilled that the Walter Baker Lofts is among our many successes.”

“I am delighted to witness the opening of the Walter Baker property,” said Senator Joyce. “When I first tackled this project several years ago, I saw the great potential to enhance the quality of life in the Lower Mills, Dorchester, and Milton communities. I am thrilled to see that teamwork and cooperation that has indeed brought this project to fruition.”

Commissioner Webber added, “DEM is thrilled to see the opening of the Lofts, which will benefit not only the moderate-income artists who will live and work in the building, but the Lower Mills community as well. The Lofts’ meeting and gallery space will be accessible to the residents in the community for exhibits and special events.”

“The Walter Baker Lofts represents a unique opportunity to do two things our company cares a lot about: preserving an historic landmark through adaptive reuse, and creating affordable live/work space for artists.” said Kuehn. “In many ways, the Walter Baker Lofts was really a labor of love for everyone involved. We enjoyed the support of both Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the City of Boston, and had the pleasure of working with a talented and dedicated development team.”

The famed Walter Baker Administration Building was built in 1919 to serve as the corporate headquarters for the company that has been making chocolate since the late-18<sup>th</sup> century. It is the oldest chocolate manufacturer in the United States. The Georgian Revival building was designed by George F. Shepard of Stearns & Shepard, and contains an elegant marble staircase, a three-story atrium topped with an overall skylight, and the well-known painting of “La Belle Chocolatiere – the trademark of the company since 1883. The building was acquired by DEM in 1988.

The renovation of the building into the Walter Baker Lofts required such work as the installation of a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system, utility upgrades, the installation of an elevator as well as other accessibility improvements, code compliance and public safety improvements, and the division of the building into the 13 rental units and two community rooms.

The rehabilitation, which was certified by the National Park Service as historic, will receive Federal Historic Tax Credits. The preservation project included plaster restoration, significant repair of the historic marble staircase, restoration of the original laylight, and the replacement in kind of the historic windows. The rehabilitation costs totaled approximately \$2.5 million. The Department of Environmental Management contributed \$500,000 to the project for code compliance, public safety and historic preservation improvements, and the City of Boston, through the Boston Redevelopment Authority, gave \$500,000 to the project to ensure the affordability of the lofts.

The Administration Building is included in DEM’s Historic Curatorship Program, an innovative leasing program for underutilized historic properties in the Commonwealth’s forests and parks system. Through this “work for rent credit” program, a “curator/tenant” is selected to rehabilitate, reuse and maintain one of the program’s 32 properties in exchange for its long-term lease.

Resident artists moved into their units on September 1, 2002. All of the units in the Walter Baker Lofts have been designated for certified artists of moderate-income, and each contains a modern kitchen and a private bathroom, plus closet space. The units range from 589 to 969 square feet, with the rental cost ranging from \$840 to \$1,260/month. The rents are tied to median income requirements as set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

For more information on the Historic Curatorship Program, contact Katie Wade Swabey, Department of Environmental Management Project Manager, at (617) 626-1399. For more information on the Walter Baker Lofts, contact Cory Fellows, Keen Development Corporation Project Manager, at (617) 661-9100.

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